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NATO'S EVOLUTION: MAINTAINING RELEVANCE

BY

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ABSTRACT

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In 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established as a deterrent to the possibility of a Soviet attack on Western Europe. Forty years later, the Soviet empire came tumbling down. This paper asks and answers the question, "Is there a reason for the United States to remain a part of the NATO Alliance," by tracking NATO's evolution from its origins, to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the Partnership for Peace, to the 1999 enlargement of the Alliance in the context of its revised Strategic Concept. The paper concludes that NATO has evolved in a manner which has equipped the Alliance uniquely to serve emerging U.S. interests in Europe over the near to mid-term.

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NATO'S EVOLUTION: MAINTAINING RELEVANCE

In April 1949 Europe was still a very dangerous place. Just five short years earlier the U.S. led military coalition had defeated the Germans and the Japanese—the last great foes of freedom or so it was thought. Yet, a new empire was rising up, under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, challenging this belief. The Soviet Union now stood opposite the free world and democratic ideals. The post wartime cooperation with Moscow had come to an end. The defeat of Germany and Japan had left a void to the east and west of the Soviet Union. The Soviets, taking advantage of this void, put the Red Army to use in conducting an expansionist policy that threatened Europe's peace and collective security¹. An alliance for the collective defense of Western Europe was needed. This was the backdrop shaping the signing of The North Atlantic Treaty, also known as The Washington Treaty that would create the NATO alliance in April 1949. The most significant piece of the treaty and the teeth of NATO is Article Five. “Article Five is the core of the Treaty whereby member countries agree to treat an armed attack on any one of them, in Europe or North America, as an attack against all of them.”² Collective defense was the primary mission of NATO for over forty years. The NATO deterrent held the Soviet Union in check and was a historic success. In 1989, the world changed yet again when the Berlin Wall came crashing down. The Cold War was over and the common enemy receded. This project seeks to answer the question, has NATO responded and evolved to meet this dramatic change in the strategic environment thereby remaining relevant to United States' interests today?

NATO'S ORIGINS: THE BACKGROUND

The United States was the driving force in the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). After being involved in two World Wars in Europe, the security and peaceful relations in the region became a strategic priority for the United States. We had learned the lesson of isolationism. NATO was formed as a defensive alliance to prevent or to repel Soviet aggression. In April 1949 twelve countries, including the United States, signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington. This was a bold step for the U.S., sending a clear message that Europe's security was in our vital interests — the Americans did not want any more World Wars. By 1955, Greece, Turkey, and Germany had joined NATO, bringing the Alliance to fifteen nations—NATO's first expansions. In 1982, Spain joined the Alliance bringing sixteen nations together. NATO's organizing concept is common defense and political cooperation based upon a consensus decision making system. Each member country retains ultimate sovereignty over its own forces. However, it is NATO's integrated command, joint

planning and interoperability that make the Alliance militarily unique. NATO also provides a forum for member countries to consult on issues affecting their security and to make decisions enhancing the security for all. NATO makes all its decisions by consensus. The 19 member nations must agree before any action is to be taken. All members, therefore, have veto authority. In summary, the Alliance is an association of member countries that are united to preserve the common defense.³

An important founding principle of NATO, as stated in the preamble to the Treaty, is to “promote peaceful and friendly relations throughout the North Atlantic Area.”⁴ The formation of NATO in 1949, however, resulted from a known threat—The USSR. The stated purpose of the NATO Alliance is to safeguard all member countries by providing for the common security of all:

- 1) Provides the foundation for security through commitment to democratic values and peaceful resolution of issues. No member country may intimidate or use force on the other to resolve conflicts.
- 2) It is the deterrence against any aggression with the teeth being Article Five calling for all members to treat an attack on any of them as an attack against all.
- 3) It provides the transatlantic forum to discuss and resolve any issues affecting the vital security interests of one of its members.⁵

NATO’s core mission and the values it defends have not changed, but the European strategic environment has. According to the National Security Strategy of the United States, the U.S. has four primary interests in the region that NATO must contribute to in order to remain relevant. These interests are a continued and renewed commitment by all the Allies to the collective defense/Article Five, to shape the strategic environment ensuring stability and peace in Europe, to build a Europe that is truly integrated erasing the dividing lines, and maintaining a credible force that can promote and enforce stability.⁶ Given this background we will now look at NATO’s ability to evolve to maintain relevance to American interests today.

INTEREST ONE: ALLIED COMMITMENT TO ARTICLE V

Since 1949, Article Five has been at the core of the Alliance. It is why the Alliance was founded and the basis for its relevance. As NATO faces evolution, it must remain committed to serving the primary interest that is at the core of the Alliance itself. Treating an attack on any member country as an attack on ones’ own sovereign soil is the strength of the Alliance. The renewed commitment of all the countries of the Alliance is vital for all the members. NATO renewed this commitment most recently at the Washington Summit in April 1999 in two ways. First by introduction of a major new initiative to improve the Article Five capabilities of the

Alliance and second through a formal declaration. The Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI) was adopted to ensure the effectiveness of multinational operations focusing on improving interoperability of member forces and adding to the military capabilities in more than 50 specific areas. The initiative will make NATO forces more mobile, survivable, lethal and sustainable, better able to come to the aid of any of its members. The new initiative is designed to meet the security challenges the Alliance faces now and in the future. In addition the "Washington Declaration" was jointly issued by all members to demonstrate a renewed commitment to Article Five and the collective defense.⁷

"We, the Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the North Atlantic Alliance, declare for a new century our mutual commitment to defend our people, our territory and our liberty, founded on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The world has changed dramatically over the last half century, but our common values and security interests remain the same Collective defence remains the core purpose of NATO".⁸

INTEREST TWO: FAVORABLY SHAPE THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

In 1989, the "Iron Curtain" was lifted and the Soviet threat, which led to the formation of the Alliance, began to recede. What was left behind was an unstable region, susceptible to conflict and seeking direction. For awhile we all got to live in a dream world, one where no military establishments were necessary. But we woke up to see a Europe with harsh realities of ethnic, national and religious discord abounding. The Warsaw Pact and the Soviet power behind it had provided much of the stability for the region. If NATO was to accomplish its stated goal of peaceful and friendly relations throughout the region they had to begin to shape the strategic environment beyond the old East-West standoff. NATO did evolve toward a focus on shaping its strategic environment by reaching out to former adversaries and offering them a partnership, and for some, membership in the Alliance itself.

In 1990-91, NATO shed its Cold War clothes by creating the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) to facilitate the reconciliation with the former Warsaw Pact countries. Its first meeting in Brussels, December of 1991, coincided with the dissolution of the USSR. The intent of the NACC was to be the primary body by which consultation and cooperation among NATO and the former Warsaw Pact countries would take place. It was to be the vehicle by which NATO would engage with non-members to begin to shape the strategic environment. The NACC was to build a relationship of mutual cooperation and consultation with the former Warsaw Pact nations. The focus was modest: defense budgets, democratic concept of civilian control of the military, defense industry conversion. NACC was a forum for information and dialogue. By March 1992 all the former Soviet republics were members of the NACC bringing

the total to 37 nations. The potential of such a forum within NATO was enormous. The United States recognized this and by June of 1992 was pushing for expansion of the role of the NACC to include cooperation on security challenges that the region faced.⁹ The U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, Ambassador Reginald Bartholomew stated it best in September of 1992:

"We cannot allow cooperation within NACC to become a largely symbolic effort, rather than an integral, substantive new part of NATO itself . . . NACC' s full potential . . . has yet to be realized. NACC has yet to grow from a forum for periodic joint consultation into a tool for delivering tangible assistance to countries whose old security policies have proven bankrupt. It has yet to develop from an arms-length friendship into a vehicle for joint action that the word 'partnership' should represent."¹⁰

Clearly more was expected of the NACC, the question was how much and how fast? The U.S. saw expansion of roles to include crisis management through dialogue, defense industrial conversion, peacekeeping and military retraining. With 37 member nations, the wheels of progress would move slowly. However, peacekeeping was added as a topic of discussion of the NACC at the end of 1992 giving potential to operational dimensions within the Alliance. This was a time of great hope for NATO.

While the NACC set the stage for the future, more was needed to continue to shape the strategic environment as well as address the concerns of the former Soviet Republics. While many were pushing for expansion of the Alliance, the January 1994 NATO Summit placed the question of enlargement in the context of regional stability. A logical move forward in the process and clear next step in its evolution was the Partnership for Peace. The Partnership for Peace (PfP) was presented as the tool for a new security relationship for NATO members and NACC members. The program was opened to all the countries of Europe and of the former Warsaw Pact. The PfP's purpose was "to increase stability, diminish threats to peace, and build strengthened relationships by promoting practical cooperation and commitment to democratic principles."¹¹ The PfP program established four guidelines:

- 1) All NACC members would be invited to join by signing an agreement with NATO.
The agreement would not impose any conditions other than ability and desire to participate.
- 2) The PfP would be a NACC activity that would build on existing NATO structures.
Partners would assign officers full time to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) to participate in planning and conducting Partnership exercises.

- 3) Partners are required to work toward the goals of joint planning, interoperability, transparency, and civilian oversight of the defense establishment. Implementation plans must be submitted.
- 4) The NATO members and the Partners agree to consult each other whenever the security of a partner, political independence, or territorial integrity was threatened. However, Article Five of the North Atlantic treaty was not extended to Partners.¹²

This was a huge step for the Alliance designed to promote stability throughout the European region. It also signaled a shift in the role of NATO from one of collective defense of members (Article Five) toward collective security for PfP members thereby strengthening and shaping the strategic environment. While collective defense applied to NATO members only, the Partners were given a commitment to political solidarity and enhanced political cooperation. In keeping with the evolving NATO, enhancing cooperation to shape a more secure environment was now seen as a key role of NATO, well beyond the Article Five role.

PfP has brought a practical, new model for cooperation with the Western democracies to the former communist states of Eastern Europe. They are now reinventing their countries with the help of NATO to meet the requirements of PfP and for some of the increased requirements of subsequent, possible NATO membership. This has brought increased stability and a spirit of cooperation throughout the region, as military affairs became increasingly transparent and control of military establishments shifted to civilian democracies.

The 1997 Madrid Summit was a major milestone in the history of NATO, as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary were invited to begin the accession process for membership in the Alliance. In the words of NATO Secretary General Solana: “Today’s meeting is a defining moment for NATO. Madrid will be remembered as the time when North America and Europe came together to shape the course of a new century. . . . Our Alliance will emerge stronger from Madrid and ready to assume all the tasks we have set for ourselves.”¹³ In fact, NATO had opened the door for new democracies to join the West in a collective effort to add to the security of all without posing threats to anyone. In 1999, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became full NATO members.

Finally, at the 1999 Washington Summit, a Membership Action Plan (MAP) was presented to support the aspirations of those PfP countries wishing to become NATO members. This plan, which draws upon PfP, is designed to strengthen candidates’ ability to become full members.¹⁴ NATO sent a clear message—no one was to be excluded.

Did NATO evolve to meet the interest of United States in shaping the strategic environment? In a ten-year span, NATO formed the NACC, PfP, added new members and

developed the Membership Action Plan to facilitate further expansion. NATO has, in fact, evolved, making a difference in the security of the region by shaping the strategic environment.

INTEREST THREE: ERASE DIVIDING LINES IN EUROPE

“As I have said, [NATO Expansion] is no longer a question of whether, but when and how. And that expansion will not depend on the appearance of a new threat in Europe. It will be an instrument to advance security and stability for the entire region...”¹⁵

—President Bill Clinton, Warsaw, July 1994

If NATO was to contribute to the goal of a Europe without dividing lines, evolution was required or more specifically, enlargement. While NACC and PfP brought NATO a long way toward European stability, it had to be demonstrated that enlargement was possible. While not all PfP members desired membership, granting membership furthered the incentive to adopt Western democratic values to those that did and demonstrated the possibilities to the others. PfP and enlargement combined to support the United States’ interest in erasing dividing lines and providing for a more stable Europe. But, evolution is not easy and does not come without resistance. Could NATO evolve to erase the lines dividing Europe for over forty years?

The “how” and “when” of a NATO expansion generated much debate. At issue was the core purpose of enlargement. Would enlargement to the East including former Warsaw Pact countries erase the dividing lines that had separated the region for forty years? Questions like these were at the heart of the charter on the study of NATO enlargement. Enlargement had to further the security interest of the members. Enlargement is not new to NATO, as Greece, Turkey, Germany and Spain joined the Alliance since its original inception. But this enlargement was different. It was to include former enemy states. Therefore, defined principles of enlargement were required. These principles flowed from NACC and the PfP. The principles included a commitment to the original Washington Treaty: democracy, rule of law and open economies. New members also committed to democratic control of the military, a minimal military and interoperability requirement, active participation in the PfP program and adequate resources to meet the financial obligations of membership.¹⁶ The 28 page NATO Enlargement Study was presented to the Allied Foreign Ministers in September of 1995. The study concluded that the “why” of enlargement was largely a function of a great new opportunity for NATO now that the Warsaw Pact had folded. This opportunity was to build a greatly enhanced security architecture for all of Europe without creating division among the countries. In fact, the opportunity to erase the old lines existed. Enlargement was the necessary evolution of the Alliance’s ability to contribute to a united Europe, insuring stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic

region. The study concluded that enlargement would support the interests of NATO members by encouraging and enhancing democratic reforms, promoting a spirit of cooperation and consensus building, and increasing the visibility of the defense/military planning and budgets of each country. The "why" of expansion was clear to the study group as a logical extension of peace, stability and removal of the lines of separation in Europe.

It was concluded that, first and foremost, any extension of membership would be in accordance with Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty, i.e., by unanimous agreement of all the members. New members would have to be granted the full rights and privileges of other members to include Article Five collective defense protections. In return, new members would agree and conform to the principles, policies and procedures that all other members have agreed to. New members would also show the ability to meet the military and financial obligations of membership to include peacekeeping missions and any other new missions NATO might assume. Active membership in the PfP program, while not required for membership, was seen as a strong preparation for membership. The study again affirmed that new membership must contribute to the overall security and stability of the existing members and the NATO region.¹⁷

December 1995 saw the next step in the enlargement process. At a meeting of Allied Foreign Ministers, it was decided that the time to progress to the next phase of the enlargement process had arrived. This next phase would consist of three parts: 1) Heighten the dialogue with interested Partners of the PfP program. 2) Review of internal adjustments the NATO organizational structure must undergo to ensure effectiveness. 3) Strengthen the PfP program to help interested Partners prepare to meet the obligations of membership. The dialogue with interested Partners would continue for a year at which time progress would be assessed. During the next year a NATO staff team was formed to conduct dialogue meetings with each of the 12 Partners that expressed a desire to gain membership. These dialogue sessions provided the Partners with a more detailed picture of what rights and obligations they would have if membership was extended and also allowed NATO to gain a better understanding of each Partner's ability to meet the obligations of membership. In addition, NATO was able to gain detailed knowledge of the military capabilities and assets of the Partners giving them a much better picture of how each Partner was to fit into the Alliance. This detailed knowledge, together with the information obtained from the PfP program and later during NATO's Bosnia peacekeeping mission (IFOR), allowed NATO staffers to analyze the true abilities of each of the Partners.

In December 1996, the North Atlantic Council met to determine the strategy for enlargement. First, they requested a comprehensive study of each of the 12 countries seeking membership to analyze the abilities of each to meet membership criteria. The previous year's work by NATO staff teams provided the foundation. Second, the Council agreed to accept the proposal by President Clinton to hold a summit in 1997. The summit would be held in Madrid in July of 1997 with the express purpose of launching the enlargement process and beginning accession talks.

As NATO stood on the brink of expansion there were still many that felt it was not necessary or wise. The arguments put forth centered primarily on cost and the fact that enlargement was not based on any strategic imperative. Opponents of enlargement protested that the cost of enlargement would be too great for the Alliance. Proponents argued that the costs were affordable and rather modest. In February of 1997, the Pentagon's cost estimate of the enlargement was placed at between \$27 to \$35 billion for the Alliance as a whole. This cost would be spread over a ten-year period. NATO performed its' own review in the fall of 1997. This included visits to military facilities in the states likely to be invited. They found things to be in better shape than previous projections and therefore felt that the Pentagon's estimate was too high. A reasonable estimate was placed in the range of \$10-\$50 billion. In addition, member states felt collective defense required them to spend less than if each were required to provide for their own defense.¹⁸ Collective defense also serves to erase dividing lines that are created by individual militaries. To place the cost in the proper perspective, the cost is about equal to the cost of procuring one U.S. weapon system or about two-thirds the cost of one armored division.¹⁹ By all accounts the benefits of collective defense and the erasing of years old dividing lines outweigh the relatively small costs of enlargement. NATO did not stop the enlargement process based on any cost estimates. As of the December 2000 Ministerial meeting, no actual cost estimates have been made available. But it is worth pointing out that Poland announced a five year \$2.3 billion military upgrade to NATO standards. The other new members plan on spending less. NATO common costs have been modest. This implies that not even the low end cost estimate will be met!²⁰

The next argument was that enlargement is not based on any strategic imperative. The logic behind this argument was that NATO should wait for a threat to appear that requires enlargement. In other words, wait for dividing lines to be re-drawn or for a peer competitor to emerge in Eurasia. Russia was seen as the most likely threat but they have not, so far, threatened European security. There are great risks associated with such an argument. First, NATO would have to define what threats constitute the necessity for enlargement. If NATO

waited for such a threat to appear, would the expansion be seen as an act of war rather than an effort to unite? In addition, waiting could very well hurt any arms control talks as Russia, for example, would feel that NATO might be preparing a covert enlargement. NATO must begin to provide stability and unity now, not after new lines of division have been drawn. By doing so, they may prevent any actions by a hostile nation.²¹ NATO was ready to move forward as arguments against moving forward had been heard and dismissed.

While NATO was ready to move forward, its strongest member, the United States, was explaining why NATO enlargement was important to Americans. We had endured two World Wars and the Cold War played out mainly on European soil bringing a clear understanding of the importance of bringing to the Eastern European countries what the Alliance had done for Europe's West. The explanations of why NATO should enlarge were straightforward. First, NATO had always been at the forefront of an effective security for Europe and the key to transatlantic security. If the U. S. was to maintain its world leadership role, NATO was one of the primary tools for doing so. Second, an undivided, stable Europe is of vital interest to the United States as has been stated in the National Security Strategy of the United States for a number of years.²² NATO enlargement served these interests. As outlined by the U.S. State Department, NATO enlargement makes the United States a safer place. The enlargement requires new members to adopt democratic values, establish market economies and peaceful relations with their neighbors. In addition, enlargement will help erase the dividing lines between Eastern and Western European countries building a more stable and united Europe.²³ A stable and united Europe that possesses democratic values and open markets is critical for United States national interests. It reduces threats to our own security and paves the way for future prosperity through enhanced trade. The United States Congress recognized the vital importance of NATO enlargement by passing the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act in July of 1996. The Act formally recognized that furthering democracy in Eastern Europe was vital to the security and stability of Europe and the United States. The United States Congress recognized the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary as having met the eligibility criteria for admission to NATO. Congress also authorized money to facilitate the expansion.²⁴

In 1999, NATO took the next step. In March of that year, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary became NATO's newest members. Their accession culminated the efforts that the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the Partnership for Peace programs began in the early 1990s. The addition of three former Warsaw Pact countries into the NATO fold broke through dividing lines that had existed for over forty years. NATO has also left the door open for further enlargement in an effort to reach out to nonmembers so that enlargement will not create any

new dividing lines. Nine countries of the Partnership for Peace immediately declared their candidacy: Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Macedonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.²⁵

Did NATO evolve to erase dividing lines and enhance stability? While the enlargement process was heavily debated, it was the necessary next action for NATO to demonstrate the credibility of its “open door” policy. The lines are not all gone but the Alliance is, in fact, striving to achieve the goal.

INTEREST FOUR: PROMOTE AND ENFORCE STABILITY ON NATO’S PERIPHERY

If NATO was to be viewed as a credible force capable of ensuring stability it again had to evolve. This evolution began with joint actions in Bosnia, first through enforcing a no-fly zone later to develop into a full peacekeeping operation (IFOR/SFOR). In 1999, NATO stepped even further into the crisis management world with “Operation Allied Force” and the KFOR peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. Interoperability and jointness among members and Partners contributed to the success of both Balkan operations. PfP proved its value.

The cooperation of all the Allied and Partner nations involved in the Balkans is unprecedented. The evolution of NATO brought these nations together, first through NACC, then PfP, and the “open door”. Never before, when the Balkan conflicts have arisen, has such a spirit of cooperation been present.²⁶ Kosovo follows a similar model and one that is available because of NATO. As we continue to shape the development and enforce the stability of another war torn region into a greater peace for all, the spirit of cooperation is ever present and vital to mission success. NATO again is the framer of such peace and stability and more able than ever to enforce it throughout the region.

At the Washington Summit, crisis management became fully a part of NATO’s new strategic concept. NATO is demonstrating this credibility every day in Bosnia and Kosovo. The 1999 strategic concept reaffirms the commitment to arms control, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and the stand against terrorism.²⁷ NATO also recognizes that peacekeeping and enforcement are now part of the core mission of the Alliance. No longer, is Article Five the only mission for NATO. The Washington Summit also called for improvements in the Alliance’s capability to respond to the WMD threat and a WMD Center was established at NATO Headquarters.

CONCLUSION

“We fly 19 flags here, and together they symbolize one of the supreme achievements of the last century. NATO is the reason history records no World

War III. By preserving the stability of Europe and the transatlantic community, NATO has kept the peace, and the work goes on.”²⁸

—President George Bush at Joint Forces Command Headquarters Feb. 13, 2001

In 1989, the wall came down and the Cold War was over. Many claimed that NATO should be traded in for a “peace dividend” since it no longer served the interests of its members. The common threat was gone. Was NATO able to evolve and respond accordingly to preserve its relevance to U.S. interests? The answer is clearly “yes”. The United States’ interests continue to be well served by NATO. NATO members have renewed their commitment to Article Five, the collective defense for all members. They have undertaken to shape the strategic environment through PfP. NATO has also made dramatic strides in erasing Europe’s dividing lines through its commitment to the “open door”. Finally, the ability of NATO to recognize new challenges on its periphery and develop the doctrine, interoperability and command structure to meet them definitively added to the capability for promoting and enforcing stability. The work in the Balkans is not finished, but the hard-earned stability in the region is a tribute to the military success of the Alliance. NATO has demonstrated its ability to adapt to a changing world and the evolving interests of its member countries. From the North Atlantic Cooperation Council to the Partnership for Peace and NATO enlargement, the Alliance has demonstrated its determination to shape its strategic environment for the better. When regional stability was challenged, NATO responded with IFOR/SFOR and KFOR. Throughout, the Alliance has never abandoned its commitment to prepare for collective defense. “Shape, Respond, Prepare.” NATO’s evolution reflects current U.S. National Military Strategy and supports key interests in our National Security Strategy. NATO’s continued relevance can not be in doubt. NATO’s relevance to United States policy is best summed up by our new Secretary of State, General Colin Powell in his confirmation testimony before the Senate: “...we believe strongly in NATO. It is the bedrock of our relationship with Europe. It is sacrosanct. Weaken NATO and you weaken Europe, which weakens America.”²⁹

WORD COUNT = 4955

ENDNOTES

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¹⁰ Ibid, 16.

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¹³ Solomon, 138.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Philip H. Gordon, ed., NATO's Transformation The Changing Shape of the Alliance (Lanham, MD: Brown & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 93.

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¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, 17-18.

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